

There is no one office of the federal government that handles all FOIA requests. Each FOIA request must be made **to the agency that originated the records** that you want. For example, if you want to know about an investigation of motor vehicle defects, write to the Department of Transportation. If you want information about a work-related accident at a nearby manufacturing plant, write to the Department of Labor (at its office in the region where the accident occurred). Most of the larger federal agencies have several FOIA offices. Some have one for each major bureau or component; others have one for each region of the country.

The FOIA does not apply to Congress, the courts, or the central offices of the White House, nor does it apply to records of state or local governments. ***The Library of Congress, being a support body for the Congress, is not subject to FOIA.*** However, the Library of Congress does make its collections available to the public for use on the premises.

You may have to do a little research to find the proper agency office to handle your FOIA request, but you will save time in the long run if you send your request directly to the most appropriate office. For assistance, you can contact the [Federal Citizen Information Center \(FCIC\)](#) of the U.S. General Services Administration. FCIC is specially prepared to help you find the right agency, office, and address. On the Internet, you can find addresses of the FOIA offices of federal agencies by going to the Justice Department's website at [www.usdoj.gov/foia/](http://www.usdoj.gov/foia/) (click on "[Other Federal Agencies' FOIA Web Sites](#)," and select "[Principal FOIA Contacts at Federal Agencies](#)").

The [U.S. Government Manual](#), the official handbook of the federal government, may also be useful. It describes the programs within each federal agency and lists the names of top personnel and agency addresses. The Manual is available at most public libraries and can be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents (ordering instructions are on page 13). In addition, each agency publishes FOIA regulations in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) that contain the mailing addresses of its FOIA offices. (For example, the Justice Department's FOIA regulations can be found in Volume 28 of the CFR, Part 16.) The CFR is available at most public libraries. Also, agencies have placed their FOIA regulations on their FOIA sites on the Internet.

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) provides access to all federal agency records except for those records (or portions of those records) that are protected from disclosure by any of nine exemptions or three exclusions (reasons for which an agency may withhold records from a requester).

The exemptions cover:

- (1) classified national defense and foreign relations information,
- (2) internal agency rules and practices,
- (3) information that is prohibited from disclosure by another law,
- (4) trade secrets and other confidential business information,
- (5) inter-agency or intra-agency communications that are protected by legal privileges,
- (6) information involving matters of personal privacy,
- (7) certain information compiled for law enforcement purposes,
- (8) information relating to the supervision of financial institutions, and
- (9) geological information on wells.

The three exclusions, which are rarely used, pertain to especially sensitive law enforcement and national security matters.

Even if information is exempt from disclosure under the FOIA, the agency still may disclose the information as a matter of administrative discretion if it chooses to do so and disclosure of that information is not prohibited by any law.

In order to make a FOIA request, simply [write a letter](#) to the ***originating*** agency. For the quickest possible handling, mark both your letter and the envelope “Freedom of Information Act Request.” Although you do not have to give a record’s title, you should identify the records that you want as specifically as possible in order to increase the likelihood that the agency will be able to locate them. Any facts that you can furnish about the time, place, authors, events, subjects, and other details of the records will be helpful to the agency in deciding where to search and in determining which records respond to your request, saving you and the government time and money.